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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving attitudes of students and parents toward the visual arts in a highly mobile, heterogeneous, suburban community outside of Chicago, Illinois. The problem examined is an historic inability of the school district to establish a permanent art education program, evidenced by the numerous times that art has been potentially, partially, or totally cut during the last twenty years. Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students and parents think that art is enjoyable and enriching for the learners but that as a subject is not as important to learn as mathematics, science, and other "academic" subjects. In addition, parents generally would like to see a change in the current grade reporting procedure for art and offered suggestions for alternate methods. Solution strategies include the implementation of an altered grade reporting procedure that assigns letter grades for art, making it consistent with the grade reporting method for the "core" curriculum subjects. Along with the grade will be written notes, specific to each student, to explain the grade in art. The grade reporting procedure will be altered by the instructor to include behavior and effort checklists to establish more objective criteria for evaluation. Finally, written information, in letter format, will be disseminated to the parents outlining the goals and structure of the elementary art program. Appendixes include pre- and post-survey instruments. (Author/JS)

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ED 388 541

IMPROVING STUDENT AND PARENT ATTITUDES TOWARD VISUAL ARTS

JILL SAFRANSKI.....B.A.

AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

AUTHOR: Jill Safranski SITE: Elgin
DATE: September 1993

TITLE: Improving Student and Parent Attitudes Towards Visual Arts

ABSTRACT: This report describes a program for improving attitudes of students and parents toward the visual arts in a highly mobile, heterogeneous, suburban community outside of Chicago, Illinois. The problem examined is an historic inability of the school district to establish a permanent art education program, evidenced by the numerous times that art has been potentially, partially, or totally cut during the last twenty years.

Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students and parents think that art is enjoyable and enriching for the learners but that as a subject is not as important to learn as math, science, and other "academic" subjects. In addition, parents generally would like to see a change in the current grade reporting procedure for art and had some suggestions for alternate methods.

Solution strategies include the implementation of an altered grade reporting procedure that assigns letter grades for art, making it consistent with the grade reporting method for the "core" curriculum subjects. Along with the grade will be written notes, specific to each student, to explain the grade in art. The grade recording procedure will be altered by the instructor to include behavior and effort checklists to establish more objective criteria for evaluation. Finally, written information, in letter format, will be disseminated to the parents outlining the goals and structure of the elementary art program.

Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

General Statement of Problem

The establishment of a permanent art education program is jeopardized by negative preconceptions regarding the visual arts held by students and parents.

Immediate Problem Context

Ridge Circle Elementary School, located in Elgin Unit District 46, is attended by 572 students. The student population served by Ridge Circle School is racially, ethnically, and economically diverse; the majority of pupils (66 percent) are Caucasian with the largest minority group being Mexican-American (21 percent), with the balance divided between students of African-American, Asian, and Native American origin. Nearly one quarter (23 percent) of Ridge Elementary pupils have been classified as limited-English-proficient, significantly (18 percent) higher than the state average. The socioeconomic status of Ridge Circle students ranges from solidly middle class down to the lower reaches of poverty (16 percent classified low-income).

Unit District 46 itself, the second largest school district in Illinois, serves 28,068 students who attend 42 schools, including three high

schools, six middle schools, and 33 elementary schools. Student population has increased regularly in recent years and an addition of at least 700 students is expected for the 1993-94 school year. The school year 1991-92 saw the opening of three new elementary schools while the school board is discussing the need to eventually open a new middle school and high school.

Ridge Circle Elementary School administration consists of one principal and a support staff of ten (secretaries, janitors, lunch workers). The faculty includes 27 classroom teachers, three itinerant specialists for Art, Music, and Physical Education, one resource specialist for the learning disabled, one speech therapist, one Chapter One specialist, one social worker, one librarian, and four teacher's aides.

The faculty member responsible for the teaching of art education at Ridge Circle is a certified K-12 art instructor. The parameters of duties include curriculum development, teaching five to six art classes daily, lesson planning, creating displays of student artwork in the halls of the school, selecting the same to contribute to district exhibits, filling out grades each quarter, and ordering art supplies for the school.

Each week the art specialist teaches 27 art classes, 24 at Ridge Circle and three at Sheridan School. All grade levels receive 45 minutes of art instruction per week except kindergarten, which receives 30 minutes. Lessons are given in the students' regular classroom setting as there is no art room available at Ridge. The art teacher travels from class to class with approximately five minutes

between classes, using an art cart; because of the limited time all art supplies and lesson materials must be organized before the start of the school day.

The elementary art budget for the 1993-94 school year in District U-46 is $1.30 per pupil. Art materials are housed in a small storage room that also functions as the art specialist's office. This space is shared with the music specialist, surplus band equipment, regular classroom and janitorial supplies and a large stack of soda for the staff lounge.

In addition to the building principal, there is an administrative program coordinator for art and music who attends art staff meetings and institutes. This art supervisor is substantively helpful to the art specialists and is an advocate of art education in the public schools. Unfortunately, due to disparate responsibilities, the supervisor is not always available.

The Surrounding Community

Ridge Circle Elementary is located in the village of Streamwood, a primarily residential, northwest suburban community of 30,000 persons. While the population level of Streamwood is relatively stable, individual students are moving in and out of Ridge Circle's attendance boundaries at the rate of 30 percent a year. This is a rate of mobility higher than the district average (26.4 percent) or that of the state (20.4 percent).

Streamwood's economic status varies from middle to working class with the largest plurality being lower middle or blue collar families. Students at Ridge Circle who actually live in public housing

units are bussed in from Elgin, a neighboring locality. The community is ethnically heterogeneous; 13 percent of residents are Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese), African-American, or Native American, 20 percent identify themselves as Mexican-American. The balance is predominately native born Caucasians or are immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Middle East or India.

State and National Context of Problem

The attitude of the American public towards art education runs the gamut from advocacy to indifference to hostility. The arts, along with foreign language study and physical education, are not highly valued by most parents and are frequently targeted by local tax watchdogs as frivolities. Not only do these subjects get short shift by back-to-basics advocates who call for a mathematics-science based curriculum, but they also frequently trail extracurricular sports in popularity and funding. Students at every level view the arts as easy to learn and being of low importance. Fortunately, these same students also rank the arts as their most liked subjects in school (Goodlad, 1984).

Typifying the back-to-basics approach is the absence of any mention of the arts by the America 2000 Program, the centerpiece of the Bush Administration's education policy. When national leaders or institutions show disdain for the arts, this attitude will permeate society and lower the tone of our culture.

An indicator of the esteem in which an academic area is held is the amount of time allotted for students to be taught that subject. At the elementary level, the arts receive scant attention compared to

social studies, mathematics, or English; at the secondary level few states or districts require students to study the arts at all (Eisner, 1992). This attitude on the part of school boards is hardly surprising in light of the fact that our colleges and universities, the repositories of intellectual life and Western culture, do not consider achievement in the arts when making admissions decisions (Eisner, 1989). Not only does this practice send a signal that the arts are irrelevant, but it causes the brightest students to shy away from exploring their artistic talents. Taking another (perhaps redundant) mathematics or science course for weighted credit is more important because it improves the student's chance to win admission to a prestigious school.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Background

As stated in Chapter 1, the establishment of a permanent elementary art education program in District U-46 has not occurred and its prospects for the future are uncertain. Traditionally, the district has made a practice of eliminating the arts or threatening cuts whenever there is financial trouble. In the mid 1970s cuts were repeatedly demanded by board members and then implemented piecemeal in 1976 and 1977. In 1978, all elementary arts programs were abolished with the reason given that the programs, gutted by previous budget reductions, were no longer effective. From 1978 until 1983 music, physical education, and art were taught by the classroom teachers, which often meant infrequently, inexpertly, or not at all.

After a five year hiatus, the district committee on special services reported in 1983 to the U-46 Board of Education a plan for reinstatement of the programs. Music, physical education, and then art would be restored, funds permitting, in that order. The reason art may have been last is because, of the three, the classroom teachers felt the most comfortable teaching art; although the previous art program had been nationally recognized, it was

unpopular with classroom teachers who were unhappy with the structure of the program.

In 1983 music was reinstated and continued in 1984 mainly because a referendum passed in the spring that ensured continued funding. Physical education was reestablished in 1985 and some well-meaning, "picture lady" volunteers were to be found in some of the schools doing presentations two or three times during the year. No plans at this time existed to resurrect art.

The return of the elementary art program was due to the efforts of many people. The passage of the school reform act encouraged curriculum enrichment, the Elgin Teacher's Association endorsed a re-establishment of elementary art, and a large grant was obtained primarily through the work of the secondary art supervisor; finally, it was generally felt by the public that because music and physical education were back, and the district was in sounder financial shape, it was now art's turn. According to the art education supervisor, the new art program is better liked and supported by the teachers, parents, and community than the 1970s version had been. Despite that fact, in both years that the visual art program has been fully funded in the elementary curriculum, cuts have been threatened in art as well as in music and physical education. Last year, after many turbulent meetings of the board of education, one position was cut from each of the three arts programs. This represented a stay of execution, as one board member had recommended eliminating the arts as a solution to the U-46 fiscal crisis.

Problem Evidence

Part of the evidence depicting the district's inability to establish a permanent elementary arts program is the great number of times that the visual art program has been slashed, or totally cut from the curriculum of District U-46. Elementary art has been taught only eight out of the last twenty years, six of those years the art instruction was half-time or infrequent.

Evidence that was recently obtained, a parent pre-survey and a student pre-survey, suggested that a visual art program is not ensured of a permanent place in the curriculum. The parent pre-survey was done of the parents of one sixth grade class, over the telephone. The art specialist conducted the survey with 18 out of 21 parents on a Saturday from one p.m. until five p.m., which is a completion rate of 85 percent. Although the parents had to answer the questions over the phone and a couple of the questions were lengthy, it was felt that a majority of the parents understood the questions and were able to give their answers comfortably. The parent pre-survey is displayed in Appendix A:34; its results are presented in the following pages.

Table 1

Parents' Impressions of their Child's
Elementary Art Program
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C
Percent of parents	41%	35%	24%

A- A predominately-based craft-like activities program
B- An art appreciation program that familiarizes students with different styles of art and different artists
C- A program consisting of art production, talking about artworks, art history, and aesthetics

Judging from the results to the first question, (see Table 1), parents seemed ill-informed and unaware of the intent of the current visual art program or how it operated. To begin with, there was no consistent answer given, in fact this question was the one in which the parent responses were most equally divided among the possible answers. Also, an accurate description of the visual art program as it currently exists at Ridge Circle Elementary is closest to letter C, which was chosen least by the parents. These results suggest three things: the parents are not concerned with what the art program is teaching because art is not something they feel is vital for their child to experience; the parents are assuming that the art program is the same as the one they had as children (which would account for the largest plurality picking letter A- a craft-like activities program); the parents have not been given enough information about the visual art program.

In answering question number two (see Table 2) most parents believed that by having art education their child was becoming a more well-rounded person or was gaining important knowledge and learning a different way to express themselves. This represents a generally positive attitude toward the subject area of art.

Table 2

The Effect of Art Education on the Child
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C	D
Percent of parents	33%	6%	0%	61%

A- The child is a more well-rounded person
B- The child is disadvantaged because time is taken away from learning other subjects such as mathematics, science, reading, etc.
C- The child is getting a break from more demanding academic subjects
D- The child is gaining important knowledge and learning a different way to express him or herself

When interpreting question three (see Table 3) the overwhelming result was that the parents were not aware of the way art was currently graded. A few of the parents misunderstood at first and thought that the question asked for the criteria upon which the art specialist based the grade. After this misconception was rectified and the parent still could not identify the grading procedure as it appeared on the report card, they were informed of it. This grade reporting procedure is as follows:

+ denotes student is doing well in art

✓ denotes student performance is poor in art

denotes student performance in art is average

[blank space]

Because 83 percent of the parents did not know what the grade reporting procedure for art was despite the fact that their children received grades in art every quarter for the last two years, one can assume that the parents on the whole are not concerned with their child's level of achievement in art, or that it is not a particularly clear system.

Table 3

Awareness of the Current Grade Reporting Procedure
School Year 1993-94

	Yes	No
Percent of parents	17%	83%

When asked in question four (see Table 4) if this grade reporting procedure for art seemed adequate to them, most of them (83 percent) felt that it was somewhat adequate to very adequate, some of the parents stated that this was because the "plus-blank-check" format was for art and art can not really be graded, or that they believed that this procedure was appropriate for a talent-based

assessment. This also shows again that the parents are unaware of the actual grading criteria (test scores, effort, behavior).

Table 4

The Degree to Which Parents Feel the Grade Reporting Procedure for Art is Adequate
School Year 1993-94

	1	2	3	4	5
Percent of parents	11%	6%	17%	28%	38%

1- Very inadequate
2- Somewhat inadequate
3- Somewhat adequate
4- Adequate
5- Very adequate

Interestingly, in viewing the results to question five (Table 5), only 39 percent of parents wanted the grade reporting procedure to stay as it is, while 61 percent wanted it to change to either a descriptive explanation alone, or in conjunction with a letter grade. None of the parents, however, wanted it to change to letter grades alone. This reflects parental concern that art grades might be based on innate artistic talent, and suggests that parents would appreciate more information regarding their child's progress in art.

Table 5

Parental Suggestions for the Grade
Reporting Procedure for Art
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C	D
Percent of parents	39%	28%	0%	33%

A- Wanted it to stay as it is
B- Wanted it to change to a descriptive explanation
C- Wanted it to change to letter grades
D- Wanted it to include letter grades and a descriptive explanation

Finally, 89 percent of parents in answering question six (see Table 6) stated that their child would receive less exposure to art and of a lesser quality if no art specialist was involved in the program. However, this only represents what the parents feel would happen if the art specialists, and thus the art program as it exists, were removed; it does not state that they would be willing to prevent this occurrence.

Table 6

The Change in the Child's Exposure to Art in the Absence of an Art Specialist
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C	D
Percent of parents	0%	11%	28%	61%

A- No change
B- More exposure and better quality
C- Slightly less exposure and less quality
D- A great deal less exposure and less quality

The student pre-survey was administered by the art instructor to 22 sixth grade students at Ridge Circle Elementary during the first art class of the school year. The instructor stressed that answers to the pre-survey were confidential and that honest opinions were vital to the success of the research project. Before they began the students asked clarifying questions about survey questions; every student answered the questions independently and all surveys were returned to the instructor. Several students (varying between one and five) failed to follow directions on answering certain questions and had their answers discounted for that particular question.

Results to the survey are given below while the pre-survey itself is located in Appendix B.

Table 7

The Rating of School Subjects by the Sixth Grade Target Group in Order of Enjoyment and Importance
School Year 1993-94

	Enjoyment	Importance
First	Physical Education	Social Science
Second	Art	Reading
Third	Mathematics	Mathematics
Fourth	Music	Science
Fifth	Science	Language
Sixth	Language	Physical Education
Seventh	Reading	Art
Eighth	Social Science	Music

The data from the survey in the immediate setting conform to the results of the national survey by Goodlad (1984). Students rated enjoyment of the arts (art, music, physical education) ahead of other subjects, but unfortunately, they usually considered a subject's "importance" to be inversely proportional to enjoyment received in learning (see Table 7).

The results to question three (see Table 8) reveal that a majority of students were at least somewhat happy with the current grade reporting procedure as it appears on the report card. This level of contentment indicates that some students might be concerned about a change from the "plus-blank-check" system to a procedure with greater clarity.

Table 8

The Degree to Which Students are Happy with the Grading Procedure for Art
School Year 1993-94

	1	2	3	4	5
Percent of students	0%	15%	39%	29%	19%

1- Very unhappy
2- Unhappy
3- Somewhat happy
4- Happy
5- Very happy

Although the students were relatively pleased with the current format, the results to question four (see Table 9) show a clear divergence on the issue of change. Half of the students surveyed wanted to keep the current "plus-blank-check" system while the other half preferred letter grades or letter grades coupled with descriptive explanation. This dichotomy suggests that student preference of grading procedures is connected to their own estimation of what they will deserve for an art grade. A student expecting high achievement desires the more specific letter grade. A student with low expectations seeks the obscuring comfort of a less specific check or blank.

Table 9

Student Suggestions for the Grading Procedure for Art
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C	D
Percent of students	49%	3%	14%	34%

A- would like it to stay as it is
B- would like it to change to a descriptive explanation
C- would like it to change to letter grades
D- would like it to include letter grades and a descriptive explanation

Probable Causes

An underlying cause of the visual art program's uncertain place in the curriculum is that parents and students do not value art as highly as other academic subjects. Art is regarded as occupying a lower intellectual rung than mathematics, science, history, and English. Nearly all of the parents surveyed were unaware of their child's achievement in art or even what the procedure was for assessing students in art. (One parent was not even aware that U-46 had an elementary art program.) When the parents were informed of the "plus-blank-check" grading procedure, most of them believed it was adequate for the subject of art, which suggests that it would not be for the other subjects. The students report that they like having the subject of art but do not feel it is as important to learn compared to language, mathematics, reading, science, and social studies.

The lesser esteem in which art is regarded by parents may likely be attributed to the vague, confusing grade reporting procedure that is inconsistent with the evaluation of student performance in other subjects. The fact that art achievement is reported differently (along with music and physical education) implies that art, as a subject, is somehow not quite on par with mathematics, reading, and so forth. This contributes to the feeling of parents and students that art should not be valued equally and any performance here is not of much concern academically. While a "plus" is generally regarded positively on a report card, a "check" may be as well since the parents may presume that this denotes accomplishment. Also, by leaving the space blank on the report card to signal average achievement in art by a student (which is usually the majority of students), contributes to parental confusion about their child's grade in art, or about whether their child is even in art class. It is as if in the Olympics, instead of giving numerical scores, the judges applauded the gold medalists, gave a thumbs up sign for athletes not making the cut, and then did nothing for those in between, all the while not explaining anything to the spectators. Finally, the parents' misconceptions of the current art education program and what it consists of, is indicative that there is not enough information being provided to parents about the visual arts program, the criteria for assessment, and what art specialists work to accomplish in the classroom.

Probable causes for the low esteem in which the arts are held, from the literature, include the American value system, the belief

that knowledge acquisition is done mainly and most effectively through strictly verbal means, the attitude held by the general public that child-art does not have artistic value, and the lack of support, especially monetary, from state and national legislatures.

Goldstein (1983) suggests that because in America we are a scientific culture dedicated to the advancement of technological ideas, art is regarded as entertainment and not an essential part of our lives. DeTocqueville said much the same over 150 years ago in Democracy in America. "Their strictly Puritan origin, their exclusively commercial habits, even the country they inhabit, which seems to divert their minds from... the arts... have singularly concurred to fix the mind of the American on purely practical objects"(DeTocqueville, 1969, p. 466). Because most people can not make a living at it, art education is considered a luxury that will be given to children if it is affordable.

According to Hamblen (1983):

> the most exclusive use of cognition to mean conceptual learning is indicative of a particular world view that has far-ranging consequences, the most obvious and pervasive of which is that some modes of knowing are legitimated and other modes of knowing ignored (p. 178).

When nonverbal learning is separated from verbal knowing it states that the former does not constitute knowing and that nonverbal impressions of the world are inferior to verbal knowledge. Throughout much of Western history, art has been thought of as subjective, unpredictable, and imaginary. As a result of this negative predisposition toward nonverbal cognition, art educators have had to face a situation in which art creation, expression, and appreciation

have been places at the edges of social consciousness and educational priorities. Because of this many people have tried to legitimate the study of art by having art educators concentrate on the semantic content of art, namely art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. Until all modalities of knowing are equally valued, instruction in the arts will remain a frill in the educational curriculum.

Leeds (1989) states that attitudes toward children's art are such that while it has its quaint and suggestive side, it does not merit artistic value. The only groups of people that do not hold this attitude are art educators and a small group of artists that include Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Pablo Picasso. Because the emphasis of American education is currently weighted toward an academic approach, children's creative efforts and activities hold only secondary value for both children and adults.

Lastly, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established and funded by congress so that state art councils would be created. These funds are used by the state councils to support artists, art organizations, and agencies. However, nothing in the state charter requires the support of arts education. This is because the legislators assumed that local districts would continue to support them. To add more injury, the legislators defined arts education as part of the basic curriculum in 22 states but did not fund the programs (Wenner, 1988). Locally, many school boards have cut arts programs because of financial difficulties or been encouraged to do by tax watch-dog groups.

A summary of probable causes gathered from the site and the literature consist of the following:

1) Parents and students do not value art as a subject for learning as highly as other subjects (math, science, reading, etc.).

2) The grade reporting procedure for art is very vague and inconsistent with the procedure used for other subjects.

3) Parents are ill-informed of the current art education program.

4) The current American value system does not consider art education as essential to school curriculum.

5) Most people believe that knowledge acquisition is done mainly and most effectively through verbal modes of learning.

6) Childrens' art is not considered by most adults and children to have artistic merit.

7) Congress and its legislation has failed to fund art education programs.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature made to suggest possible solutions to the problem of maintaining a permanent visual art curriculum revealed three general strategies: make noise, establish standards, and get art into accountability systems (Down & Mitchell, 1993).

The first strategy, make noise, involves informing the students, parents, and school board of the art program and its importance. This could include such things as attending and speaking at school board meetings; establishing letter writing campaigns to the school board and local newspapers; disseminating program information to the public in new ways; starting a political action group of parents, teachers,and others to campaign for quality arts education; using outsiders that are advocates of the arts; inviting parents and the arts community into the schools to view the artwork and learning that occurs in the classroom (Butterfield, 1990). Using these strategies will lead to informed advocacy of the arts which is more useful than the flag-waving type.

Establishing standards for the arts will help garner the respect needed for art to be treated equally in the educational curriculum. The arts are currently one of six standards-setting projects that is being coordinated by the Office of Educational Research and

Improvement (OERI) of the United States Department of Education. Many members of one of the committees assigned to help set these standards for the arts believe that in order to anchor the arts into the curriculum, they must be taught as academic disciplines. Therefore, the study of visual art should include art creation, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. Students who are not as artistically talented could achieve success in this type of art program just as easily as their more talented counterparts (Down & Mitchell, 1993).

Making the arts accountable is the best way of ensuring that they are a viable part of education in the 21st century (Davis, 1993). To do this, a meaningful testing program should be part of the assessment procedures. Without objective evaluation, the arts will not gain equal status with the other "core" subject areas (Hamblen, 1988). Along with some form of testing, a procedure that assesses the student's creation of art and their ability to discuss art critically should be included in order to "provide a needed evaluative counterpoint to current trends toward simplistic standardization" (Wieder, 1990, p. 48).

Finally, in order for the arts to be considered accountable and thus worthy of support, clear, reliable, and valid assessment procedures must be in place in order to demonstrate with hard data the level of achievement students have gained (Davis, 1993). In the words of Gentile and Murnyack (1989) "if art education is to be taken seriously, it must be graded seriously"(p. 41).

A summary of the literature which addressed the problems related to the inability to maintain arts education programs in the school curriculum suggested the following strategies:

1) Inform the students, parents, school board, and community of the current arts education programs and their worth.

2) Develop support groups for quality arts education.

3) Invite parents, and the community into the schools to view arts displays, exhibits, performances, and classrooms.

4) Establish standards for the arts.

5) Arts education programs should be taught as academic disciplines.

6) Include testing and non-testing forms of assessment procedures to evaluate students' achievement in the arts.

7) Assessment procedures must be clear, reliable, and valid.

The implications of these solution strategies for the immediate setting were useful. While the students and the school board were well informed of the art education program, the parents were not. This was an area which could stand improvement. The only support group that existed to improve art education programs was the group of art educators themselves. Though student artwork was on continuous display at the setting, and other special art exhibits were presented, these occurrences were poorly publicized, if at all. There were standards already in place set by the art specialist that included the criteria used to determine students' achievement in a discipline-based art program. This criteria included: test scores which revealed the students' knowledge in art history and of art concepts, effort checklists that recorded the amount of time and

energy put into the creation of an artwork and the contribution of the students to the discussion of artworks, artists, and techniques, and a behavior checklist. Although these grading procedures are quite clear, valid, and reliable, the grade reporting procedures used to inform the parents of their child's achievement in art are very unclear, invalid and unreliable.

Project Outcomes

The terminal objective of this problem intervention was created to address the implications made by the literature and the results of questions one, three, four, and five of the parent pre-survey, and of questions two, three, and four of the student pre-survey. These results indicated that the students and parents believed that the subject of art was not as important to learn as math, science, social science, language, and reading.

Therefore:

> As a result of the project intervention during the period of September 1993 to October 1993, the students of one sixth grade class and their parents will increase the degree to which they value art education as measured by a parent post-survey and a student post-survey.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following process objectives define the major strategic procedures proposed for problem resolution,

1) During the first quarter of the school year 1993-94, the art education teacher at Ridge Circle Elementary will record a letter grade for and describe in written form the test scores, effort, and behavior of the students in one sixth grade art class.

2) As a result of the altered grade reporting procedure occurring during September and October of 1993, the students of the target group will receive a separate grade report form from the art teacher in their regular report cards stating more specific information about their achievement in art.

3) As a result of the altered grade reporting procedure, the students and parents will obtain more specific information about the student's progress in art in the form of a letter grade and a written explanation.

4) A written explanation of the art education program, its major components, the criteria used to assess the students' level of achievement, and the altered grade reporting procedure will be created and given by the elementary art specialist to the students of the target group and their parents at the beginning of the first quarter of the 1993-94 schoolyear.

Proposal Solution Components

The major elements of this approach designed to increase the degree to which students and parents value art education fell into two categories: an intervention to improve parents' awareness of the art education program with the assumption being that if they know what the program is and like it, they will be more willing to support it, and the intervention to change the grade reporting procedure for art, so as to make it consistent with that of math, science, language, and reading. This was an attempt to give art equal status along with the other "core" subjects on the report card and perhaps in the eyes of the parents and students.

Chapter 4

ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Description of Problem Resolution Activities

The action plan is designed to address the two major solution components stated in Chapter 3: improvement of parental awareness of the current art education program, and an alteration of the grade reporting procedure for art.

The intervention to improve parents' awareness and knowledge of the current art education program will begin in the summer of 1993 with the drafting of a letter stating information about the art program, the criteria for assessing the students in art, and of the altered grade reporting procedure. The art specialist will be responsible for doing this.

The intervention to alter the grade reporting procedure for art from the "plus-blank-check" system to letter grades with written explanations will begin in the summer of 1993 and continue through the first quarter of that school year. This will also be conducted by the art specialist.

The implementation plan is presented here in outline form and in chronological order.

1. Revise the system for recording students' progress in art.

A. Who: The art specialist will do this.

B. What: This person will create checklists (Appendices C,D) and a chart for recording students' achievement in art.

C. When: This will occur during the summer of 1993.

D. Where: Work will take place at home.

E. How: The art specialist will use some literature resources to obtain examples of appropriate systems, or will design an original system.

F. Why: The product will be used by the art teacher to ensure that specific information of the students' progress in art is gathered and recorded and can be referred to later.

2. Create a grade report form (Appendix E) for art that will be added to the regular report card.

A. Who: This will be created by the art education teacher.

B. What: A form will be created that lists all of the areas in which the student will be assessed and allows space for each in which a letter grade and notes can be written.

C. When: This will occur before school starts in the fall of 1993.

D. How: The art teacher will design a form.

E. Why: The product will communicate to the parents the areas in which the student will be evaluated in art and the results of that evaluation.

3. Write a letter (Appendix F) to parents explaining the art program and the altered grade reporting procedure.

A. Who: This will be accomplished by the art specialist.

B. What: A letter will be created that describes the major

components of the art program, the criteria that will be used to evaluate the student's achievement in art, and the changed grade reporting procedure.

C. When: This will occur during the summer of 1993.

D. Where: Work will be done at home.

E. How: The art teacher will write the letter, type it, and make copies of it. Then it will be given to the students to take home to their parents.

F. Why: The letter will make parents aware of the art program, how their child will be assessed in it, and how this achievement will be reported to them.

4. Provide an explanation of the altered grade reporting procedure for art to the students in the target group and their parents.

A. Who: This will be provided by the art education teacher.

B. What: The art teacher will give the students a letter explaining the different grade reporting procedure for art and other information about the program.

C. When: This will occur during the first art class of the school year 1993-94.

D. Where: This will take place in a sixth grade classroom.

E. How: The art teacher will explain the different procedure to the students and then clarify any confusion by answering questions. Then the students will be told to take the letter home to their parents and have one of them sign it and then bring it back to the art teacher.

F. Why: It is necessary for the students and parents to know exactly how the students' achievement in art will be reported

because it differs from the procedure used the past two years.

5. The parents will receive the specific information regarding their child's achievement in art.

   A. Who: This will be provided by the art teacher.

   B. What: The art teacher will fill out the forms that were created earlier with each student's specific letter grade and notes describing the student's achievement.

   C. When: The parents will receive this report at the end of the first quarter of school year 1993-94.

   D. How: The students will take the report card with the art grade insert home to their parents.

   E. Why: This will inform the students and parents of the student's achievement in art.

Methods of Assessment

The data collection methods that will be used to assess the effects of the interventions include a parent post-survey and a student post-survey. These will be conducted at the end of the first quarter of the school year 1993-94. The results will then be compared to those of the pre-surveys to determine any change in the attitudes of parents or students toward the visual art program.

Chapter 5

EVALUATION OF RESULTS AND PROGRESS

Implementation History

Terminal Objectives

The terminal objective that this problem intervention was created to address were the indications made by students and parents on pre-surveys that the subject of art was not as important to learn as math, science, social science, language, and reading.

Therefore:

> As a result of the project intervention during the period of September 1993 to October 1993, the students of one sixth grade class and their parents will increase the degree to which they value art education as measured by a parent post-survey and a student post-survey.

Pre Assessment Activities

Two pre-assessment activities were done in order to ascertain how parents and students valued visual art education in relation to other school subjects. First, the parent pre-survey was completed during the summer before the 1993-94 school term and was conducted by the visual art specialist over the telephone with a majority of the parents (83 percent). The second assessment procedure was a student pre-survey given by the art

teacher to the target group of sixth graders during their first art class of the school year.

Interventions

Two interventions were made to address the existing problem of an art education program that has failed to secure a permanent place in the curriculum.

The first intervention, to improve parental awareness and knowledge of the art education program, was the drafting and dissemination of a letter stating the premise of the art program, the criteria for assessing students in art, and the altered grade reporting procedure used by the art specialist. The second intervention involved the altering of the grade reporting procedure for art from the "plus-blank-check" system to letter grades with written explanations by the art specialist.

Post Assessment Activities

There were two post assessment procedures used by the art specialist. First, a student post-survey, which is located in Appendix G, was given to the sixth grade target group after the students received their report cards, which included the grade report form for art (see Appendix E). The second assessment was a parent post-survey (see Appendix H) that was given to the parents to fill out in person during a conference with the art specialist. Eighty-five percent of the parents completed the post-survey.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

The following tables 10 through 13 depict the results from the corresponding questions one through five on the parent post-survey.

Even after a detailed letter was sent to each parent that stated the art program consisted of art production, child-centered criticism of art works, art history, and aesthetics, the post-survey results again show no consistent answer given to this same question (see Table 10). The only change noted was that more parents chose response B and less chose response A. The number of parents who chose response C in the pre and post-surveys is exactly the same. This data suggests two things: the parents signed the letter without reading it; the parents read the letter, which improved their impression of their child's art program, but not to the extent that they could remember exactly what it was.

Table 10

Parents' Post-Impressions of the Child's
Elementary Art Program
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C
Percent of parents	23%	54%	23%

A- A predominately-based craft-like activities program
B- An art appreciation program that familiarizes students with dtfferent styles of art and different artists
C- A program consisting of art production, talking about artworks, art history, and aesthetics

In answering the second question (see Table 11) a majority of parents still expressed a generally positive attitude toward the subject of art. A few of them actually improved their attitude toward art education, resulting in more parents picking letter D and less choosing response A. No real change occured with the responses to letters B and C.

Table 11

The Effect of Art Education on the Child (Post-Survey)
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C	D
Percent of parents	22%	0%	6%	72%

A- The child is a more well-rounded person
B- The child is disadvantaged because time is taken away from learning other subjects such as mathematics, science, reading, etc.
C- The child is getting a break from more demanding academic subjects
D- The child is gaining important knowledge and learning a different way to express him or herself

An overwhelming change was manifested in the response of parents to question three that revealed a dramatic increase in parental awareness of their child's achievement in art and how it was reported. Before the intervention only seventeen percent of parents were aware of the grade reporting procedure for art and subsequently this figure skyrocketed to 100 percent. This improvement was likely due to the fact that the reporting system

was of greater clarity and became quite visible, since it was attached separately to the report card. In addition, extra attention might have been drawn to the system by their child if the student was exited by their grade in art.

When answering question four (see Table 12) the parents stated overwhelmingly that they were very pleased with the altered grade reporting procedure used for art during the first quarter of the school year. Even though a majority of the parents had indicated that the "plus-blank-check" procedure was adequate on the pre-survey, their responses showed even greater satisfaction to the altered grade reporting procedure on the post-survey. This suggests that the parents were content with the "plus-blank-check" procedure until they were confronted with something new.

Table 12

The Degree to Which Parents Are Happy With the Altered Grade Reporting Procedure For Art
School Year 1993-94

	1	2	3	4	5
Percent of parents	0%	0%	6%	29%	65%

1- Very unhappy
2- Somewhat unhappy
3- Somewhat happy
4- Happy
5- Very happy

Finally, in viewing the results to question five (see Table 13), after the parents were informed of their child's achievement in

art through a letter grade and a written explanation, only eleven percent stated that they wished the " plus-blank-check" procedure to be used to evaluate their child's progress in art in the future. The great majority (83 percent) wanted their child's achievement in art to continue to be reported as a letter grade along with a written explanation. This is considerably higher than the 33 percent response to the same question on the pre-survey.

Table 13

Parental Suggestions for the Future Grade Reporting Procedure for Art
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C	D
Percent of parents	11%	6%	0%	83%

A- Wanted the "plus-blank-check" procedure
B- Wanted a descriptive explanation
C- Wanted letter grades only
D- Wanted letter grades along with a descriptive explanation

Tables 14 through 16 present the results to the corresponding questions one through five of the student post-survey which is located in Appendix G.

When students rated their school subjects in order of enjoyment and importance (see Table 14) they again rated the arts high in terms of enjoyment and low in terms of importance. While art was rated a little higher in importance and a little lower

in enjoyment this is not significant because the rankings of other subjects changed slightly as well.

Table 14

The Post-Rating of School Subjects by the Sixth Grade Target Group in Order of Enjoyment and Importance
School Year 1993-94

	Enjoyment	Importance
First	Physical Education	Mathematics
Second	Music	Reading
Third	Art	Social Science
Fourth	Mathematics	Science
Fifth	Science	Language
Sixth	Social Science	Art
Seventh	Language	Physical Education
Eighth	Reading	Music

The results to question three (see Table 15) revealed that the students were very happy with the altered way their achievement in art was reported to their parents during the first quarter. This is most likely due to the fact that the students experienced success in art this first grading period (all A's and B's) and because they liked reading the primarily positive comments written about their progress.

Table 15

The Degree to Which Students Are Happy With the Altered Grading Procedure for Art
School Year 1993-94

	1	2	3	4	5
Percent of students	4%	0%	0%	38%	58%

1- Very unhappy
2- Unhappy
3- Somewhat happy
4- Happy
5- Very happy

Demonstrating continuity, when answering question four (see Table 16) 96 percent of the students stated that their preferred grade reporting procedure was one that required a letter grade only or in combination with a descriptive explanation. This is a 100 percent increase over those students who so indicated prior to the intervention.

Table 16

Student Suggestions for the Future Grading Procedure for Art
School Year 1993-94

	A	B	C	D
Percent of students	4%	0%	28%	68%

A- Wanted the "plus-blank-check" procedure
B- Wanted a descriptive explanation
C- Wanted letter grades only
D- Wanted letter grades with a descriptive explanation

Lastly, in question five the students were asked if they put more effort into their achievement in art when they knew they would receive a letter grade and a written explanation instead of a plus, blank, or check. Fourty-nine percent said they did try harder because of the altered grade reporting procedure. Not only did this result in greater learning and higher quality art works by half of the target group but it could lead to a greater respect for art education if it was continued.

Reflections and Conclusions

During the project intervention the target group of sixth graders displayed a high level of achievement in art class. All of the students earned an A or B. Their test scores were high, especially when compared to the test scores of the other two sixth grade classess who were still under the "plus-blank-check" regime. Student effort toward their artwork and in discussions of artwork were noteworthy and their behavior was excellent. The target group, from the beginning of the first quarter were noticably concerned with their progress from week to week. The other sixth grade classes were not.

Both parents and students liked the altered grade reporting procedure for art and wanted it to continue in the future. The impression and opinion of the art education program held by parents and students of the target group improved slightly after the intervention.

During the second quarter, when students returned to the "plus-blank-check" procedure, a little over half of the students in the target group dropped in achievement for art. Previously, every student during the intervention earned an A or B for art. After the intervention ended and the "plus-blank-check" system was restored, half of the students rated a blank(C), less than half received pluses (A's orB's), and two students regressed to a check(D). This lower level of class achievement continued into the third quarter but improved slightly over the second quarter. A little more than half of the target group merited the equivelent to an A or B in art, and a little less than half received the equivelent to a C; no student received the equivelent to a D or E.

According to the results of this project intervention it is evident that grades do indeed motivate students to do better. Half of the students admitted on the post-survey that they did try harder during the first quarter because they were going to receive a letter grade and written explanation, and roughly half dropped in achievement when this altered grade procedure was no longer in effect.

Students, like people in general, put more effort into things they value. Half of the target group put greater effort into their achievement in art because they were going to receive a letter grade as they would for their other subjects. It became more important for them to do well in art, as it is for them to do well in their other "academic" subjects.

Chapter 6

DECISIONS ON THE FUTURE

Solution Strategy

The results from the parent and student post-surveys suggest that the altered grade reporting procedure and sending of an informative letter should be continued. The parents and students overwhelmingly preferred the changed grade reporting system which included letter grades and specific, written commentary about the student's achievement in art. Furthermore, the students' achievement in art was substantially higher during the time period of this project intervention than any other subsequent grading period. However, the attitude held by parents and students on visual art education did not improve greatly. Modifications of the solution strategy could include a longer assessment period, a more concise informational letter about the art education program, and an art exhibit which would involve parents coming into the school to observe their child speaking on artworks and demonstrations of what they are learning in art class.

Additional Applications

In addition to changing the grading procedure for art from the current "plus-blank-check" system to one of letter grades and written explanation, the placement of and language that accompanies the art evaluation section of the report card should be reformed. The section used by the teacher to evaluate progress in art should be included in the academic subjects area along with math, science, language, social science, etc. Currently, art is placed in an area called "basic skills." Also, the present language that is used to assess a student's progress in art is as follows: "Shows interest and participates in art." This suggests evaluation of only one of the four components of the District U-46 art education curriculum- art production, and leaves out any assessment of art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. The language should be revised to read: "Demonstrates knowledge of art concepts and history while participating in art." In addition, the grading systems, their placement on the report card, and language of the evaluation sections of music and physical education should be similarly altered.

Dissemination of Data and Recommendations

The results of this project intervention should be shared with the elementary art specialists of the district and then possibly with the elementary music and physical education specialists as well. Discussion of the findings should take place and feedback from the other elementary arts teachers solicited. Afterwards, a presentation to the superintendent and board of education of

School District U-46 might be made by the visual art specialist involved with the project intervention. During this presentation a recommendation to alter the evaluation procedure for visual art, music, and physical education as it appears on the report card would be made. Due to the increased amount of time that would be required by the arts specialists to accomplish this altered grade reporting procedure, it would be suggested for use only with students in the intermediate grades. A simple but clear grading system of 1,2,3 (1 being high, 3 being low) could be used for the primary grades instead of the still confusing "plus-blank-check" procedure. This is due to the fact that the elementary arts specialists evaluate approximately twnty times as many students each grading period than a classroom teacher does. Also, it would be recommended to the elementary arts teachers that they do include written explanations along with the letter grades, especially the first year if this is implemented and preferably on a consistent basis. The crucial variable in the success of this altered grade reporting system is the elementary arts specialists. The system must be used correctly and consistently by all of the teachers to ensure that a positive attitude is held by parents and students toward the new procedure.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Parent Pre-Survey

1. Which of the following coincides most closely with the impression you have been given of what your child's elementary art program consists of?
   a) A predominately-based craft-like activities program
   b) An art appreciation program that familiarizes students with different styles of art and different artists
   c) A program consisting of art production, talking about artworks, art history, and aesthetics

2. Do you feel that by having art education your child
   a) is a more well-rounded person
   b) is disadvantaged because time is taken away from learning other subjects such as math, science, reading, etc.
   c) is getting a break from more demanding academic subjects
   d) is gaining important knowledge and learning a different way to express him/herself

3. Are you aware of the way art is currently graded?

   Yes No

4. To what degree do you feel that this grading procedure is adequate?(1 is low, 5 is high)

   1 2 3 4 5

5. Would you like to see the grading procedure for art
   a) stay as it is
   b) change to a descriptive explanation
   c) change to letter grades
   d) include letter grades and a descriptive explanation

6. How do you feel your child's exposure to art would change if no art specialist was involved in the program?
   a) same exposure
   b) more exposure and better quality
   c) slightly less exposure and less quality
   d) a great deal less exposure and less quality

Appendix B

Student Pre-Survey

1. Rate the following subjects in order of enjoyment-most enjoyable(1) to least enjoyable(8).

   Art
   Language.
   Math
   Music
   Physical Education
   Reading
   Science
   Social Science

2. Rate the following subjects in order of importance-most important to study(1) to least important(8).

   Art
   Language
   Math
   Music
   Physical Education
   Reading
   Science
   Social Science

3. To what degree are you happy with the way art is graded? (1 is low, 5 is high)

   1 2 3 4 5

4. Would you like to see the grading procedure for art
   a) stay as it is
   b) change to a descriptive explanation
   c) change to letter grades
   d) include letter grades and a descriptive explanation

Appendix C

Effort Checklist

Students	8/31	9/7	9/14	9/21	9/28	10/5	10/12	10/19	10/26	

Students can earn up to three points per class period in art.

27-24 pts.=A 18-14 pts.=C 8-below=E

23-19 pts.=B 13-9 pts.=D

Students receive an automatic two points if absent.

Appendix D

Behavior Checklist

Students	8/31	9/7	9/14	9/21	9/28	10/5	10/12	10/19	10/26	

Students receive a checkmark for each warning, referral, or other consequence they receive for misbehavior.

0-1 marks=A 2-3 marks=B 4-6 marks=C 7-9 marks=D 10 or more marks=E

Appendix E

Grade Report Form

Grade Report Form for Art

First Quarter Grade: _____

Test Scores: _____
out of 100%

Effort Grade: _____
(Production and discussion of artworks)

Behavior Grade: _____

If you have any questions, please ask them when I contact you.

Thank you,
Mrs. Jill Safranski

Appendix F

RIDGE CIRCLE SCHOOL

PRINCIPAL/BILL WHITE
SECRETARY/NANCE BOGLUND

From the Art Teacher at Ridge Circle:

Dear Parents,

School has begun and I am excited to be teaching art at Ridge Circle; we have a full year planned! I have written this letter to share with you what your child will be experiencing in the art program. This letter explains three related subjects: a description of the art education program at Ridge Circle, the criteria used to evaluate your child's achievement in art, and the altered grade reporting procedure for art that will be used for the first quarter.

The current art education program at Ridge Circle School is composed of four elements: art creation by students, the study of art history, discussion of artworks (by students as well as famous artists), aesthetics- the study of beauty and how art relates to life.

The criteria used to assess your child's achievement in art is derived from three areas. The first is test scores. The tests cover art history and concepts learned in art class such as perspective and color theory. The second area is effort. The students can earn up to three points per class period for the amount of effort they put into their artwork and into the discussion of artworks. The third area evaluated is behavior. If the student is following directions in class most of the time they will receive a good behavior grade; if they are continually attempting to disrupt the class or prevent other students from working, they will receive a poor behavior grade. Each of these areas contributes to the final quarter grade of each student, as they have the past two years. I wish to emphasize that talent is NOT considered when evaluating your child's achievement in art. That would be most unfair to the students who are not as artistically gifted. However, in my experience I have found that all students can produce good works of art (perhaps not consistently), improve their thinking skills and express themselves creatively.

Lastly, I need to inform you of the altered grade reporting procedure that will be used only for the first quarter. The new grade reporting procedure is based on information gained from the parent survey that I conducted this summer. For art, your child will receive a letter grade accompanied by a written explanation of their achievement in each of the three areas mentioned above. This new procedure is part of an important research project that I am engaged in for my master's degree.

I hope this letter has answered any questions you may have regarding the art program; however, if anything in this letter requires clarification or if you have other concerns, please contact me at Ridge Circle School.

Thank you,

Mrs. Jill Safranski

parent- please sign after reading

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Appendix G

Parent Post-Survey

1. Whichof the following coincides most closely with your present impression of your child's elementary art program?

a) A predominatelt-based craft-like activities program
b) An art appreciation program that familiarizes students with different styles of art and different artists
c) A program consisting of art production, talking about artworks, art history, and aesthetics

2. Do you feel that by having art education your child

a) is a more well-rounded person
b) is disadvantaged because time is taken away from learning other subjects such as mathematics, science, reading,etc.
c) is getting a break from more demanding academic subjects
d) is gaining important knowledge and learning a different way to express him/herself

3. Are you aware of the way your child's achievement in art was reported this first quarter?

Yes No

4. To what degree were you happy with the grade reporting procedure for art this first quarter? (1 is low, 5 is high)

1 2 3 4 5

5. In which of the following ways would you prefer to have your child's achievement reported in the future?

a) As a plus, blank, or check
b) As a descriptive explanation
c) As a letter grade
d) As a letter grade along with a descriptive explanation

Appendix H

Student Post-Survey

1. Rate the following subjects in order of enjoyment-most enjoyable (1) to least enjoyable (8).

Art
Language
Math
Music
Physical Education
Reading
Science
Social Science

2. Rate the following subjects in order of importance-more important to study (1) to least important (8).

Art
Language
Math
Music
Physical Education
Reading
Science
Social Science

3. To what degree were you happy with the way your achievement in Art was reported to your parents this first quarter? (1 is low, 5 is high)

1 2 3 4 5

4. In the future, would you prefer to have your grade for Art reported as

a) a plus, blank, or check
b) a descriptive explanation
c) a letter grade
d) a letter grade along with a descriptive explanation

5. Did the fact that you knew that you would receive a letter grade and written explanation for Art make you try harder?

Yes No